

OCTOBER 29, 1981

The heavy October rains have about shut down livestock work in the Shortgrass Country. What's left of the fall work has been delayed. Only outfits that have access to hard surfaced roads or own all-weather gooseneck trailers have been able to market their stock.

Just before the rains started we had a load of old cows and drys cut off to sell. Our traps were so stomped out they looked like the main alley leading to the scales at an auction ring. Before we could truck the cattle to town the oil companies cut ruts deep enough in the county roads to make any means impracticable except a trail drive on horseback, and that sure didn't have any appeal, with the market dropping close to two cents on packer cows every opening day and about one inch of cold rain falling every 24 hours.

So as a last resort, I had the cows moved over to an abandoned field that's still fenced off from the pastureland. It hadn't been planted in 15 years. All the grazing the farm had to offer was a few sprigs of fallow row trickle grass and a little browse off some second growth mesquite seedlings. But I figured the dry end of the cows might learn a lesson from standing out on near barren soil for a few weeks. I hated to punish the old gals that were being shipped because of their age, yet I didn't feel one misgiving about putting those fruitless sisters in a bare patch of turpentine weeds for their last stay before the killing floor.

With the board bill on a mother cow running \$300 a year, and her calf having to work perfect to average that much money, dry cows are in about the same league as process servers and court referees. The sight of buzzards circling the sky aren't as sickening as those freeloaders are standing around a water trough chock full of grass and overflowing with a charge of high priced mineral salt.

In other days. I saw plenty of nine and 10 year old cows that had never nursed a calf. It was once my misfortune to have to help eat a barren cow that was so old that her bone marrow looked like corn meal. The butcher had to use a rock saw to split her in half. My kids had so much trouble chewing up the chili meat that Child Who Sits in the Sun kept a grinding rock on the table to help beat the gristle into a pulp.

I'll always remember how hard the Boss tried to sell us on that beef. We'd come into dinner that winter all cold and tired. By the time we'd chewed off a batch of that dry round steak, it'd take the rest of the afternoon to recover from the chore.

Nobody to my knowledge has ever gone broke out here waiting for the weather to dry up enough to ship or shear. Plenty of us have been mighty shaken from too much sunshine. and too many dry tracks to roll upon.

If we don't make the market by next week, I am going to start looking for a packer bull to run with the selling herd. Other operators use field grazing for their stock. Who knows I may turn into a big farmer before the ground ever dries.